OLD TALES OF JAPAN

VOLUME I

BY
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FOREWORD

by

Elizabeth Gray Vining

The folk tales of the world are the heritage of the children of all nations. However language and customs may differ, the stories that come out of the childhood of mankind have a universal appeal. The characters and the settings vary, but the themes express lasting truths of human experience. The choice of the most modest of three boxes always brings a reward; a world-wide search finds its final goal at home; and animals repay human kindness; meddling with forbidden mysteries calls down disaster upon the disobedient one.

Here are three old Japanese tales translated and delightfully retold for English-speaking children by Mrs. Yasuda. The tongue-cut sparrow, the kind old man and the jealous old woman, Father and Mother Nezumi and their lovely daughter, and the fisherman who rode turtle-back to the Dragon Palace in the depths of the sea, will all find their way into the hearts of a new generation of children.

To

MY CHILDREN

who have brought me great happiness

CONTENTS

THE STORY OF SHITAKIRI SUZUME.

The Tongue-cut Sparrow..... 9

THE STORY OF NEZUMI NO YOMEIRI.

The Marriage of a Mouse.....45

THE STORY OF URASHIMA TARŌ.

The Fisherman 63

SHITAKIRI SUZUME

ONE fine day a little bird slipped from a tree and broke her wing. Birdies don't fall from trees but this was an unusual accident.

It hurt her very much, and when she found she was unable to fly away again, she started fluttering on the ground and cried, "Oh, help me! Oh, someone, help me!"

Just then there came along a very kind old man with a white beard. He had been for a walk on this fine day, and when he saw the poor little bird, he stooped and picked her up.

The little bird sobbed and her sobbing sounded something like this:—

"Chu chu chun chun"

"Poor little birdie," said the kind old man, "I'll take care of you."

So the old man took the bird to his home where he lived with his wife, and nursed it tenderly. He made a tiny pad for the injured wing and bandaged it carefully. Everyday she had it attended and the wing grew better and stronger.

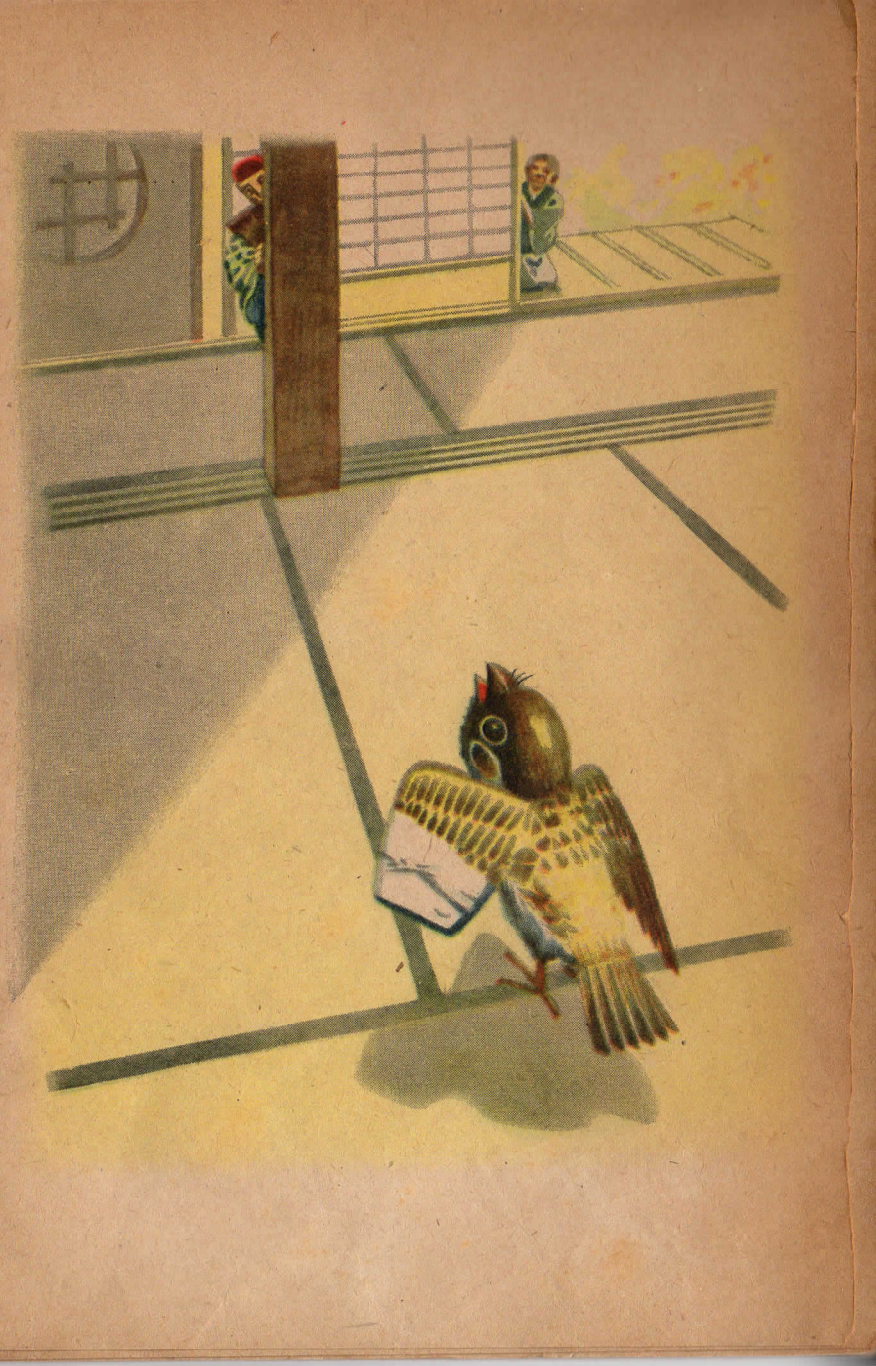
It was not long before the little bird was able to fly around the room again. The old man called her Suzumesan which means sparrow and the birdie called the old man Ojiisan which means Grandpa.

Suzumesan and Ojiisan grew to love each other dearly. Suzumesan slept with Ojiisan. She ate out of his plate. They also played

games together and their best game was hide and seek, because Suzumesan found the most unthought of places to hide in. Her excited chirrups and Ojiisan's happy laughter were heard all over the house.

Now the wife of Ojiisan was a jealous selfish person. She did not like Suzumesan at all because the little bird made Ojiisan so happy.

"Come Obaasan," the two would call out, "Join us in this good game!" But Obaasan only scowled and shut her paper door with a bang. Ojiisan felt very sorry for her.



One day Ojiisan had to go on an errand, and as he couldn't take Suzumesan with him, he left her with Obaasan.

"Be a good little birdie. Be quiet—Don't trouble Obaasan." said the kind old man, "I'll be home soon."

Suzumesan felt very lonely. She hopped around Obaasan's corner and cocked her head on one side and tweeted softly to attract attention. She looked very winning but Obaasan paid no attention to her.

She was busy washing her clothes. After washing them, she soaked them in starch and laid them out to dry. The starch was

in a bowl in the sun.

Suzumesan sighed a tiny sigh and fluttered towards the bowl. It looked tempting and dazzling in the sunlight—so she took a peck at it. Why, it tasted good! She took another peck and then another, and very soon the bowl was empty.

But just then Obaasan came rushing towards her and gave an angry scream.

"You wicked creature! You've eaten my precious starch." she shouted and grabbed poor little Suzumesan in her hands.

She felt the soft furry feathers and the agitated heart beating hard. She heard her

crying:—"Chun, chun, chun." which meant, "I'm sorry, sorry, sorry." But do you know what the wicked woman did?

She opened Suzumesan's little beak,—picked up a pair of scissors and cut her tongue!

Oh how it hurt! Suzumesan gave a piteous cry and flew over the roof—above the trees—away into the sky.

Obaasan followed her with a wicked look and smacked her lips. "Now I'm rid of the silly little thing."

And she went on with her work.

Presently Ojiisan came back.

"Tadaima." he called which means, "I've just returned."

No Suzumesan fluttered out to greet him.

Only Obaasan who was very self satisfied.

But when Ojiisan heard the story he was very distressed. He just turned away without a word and though he was tired he walked out towards the meadow over the hills, up a narrow path, where he thought he'd find Suzumesan.

And all the while he called—

"Shitakiri Suzume! Tongue-cut little birdie! Where is your home? Where do you live?"

Long after that, he came to a big bamboo grove. Here he heard many sparrows twittering, for a bamboo grove is a sparrow's home. Presently he did hear dear Suzumesan's voice among a hundred others.

"Ojiisan! Ojiisan! Here I am. Welcome to our home! Come along up here."

And everywhere he heard chirrupings—

"Welcome! Welcome! Welcome!"

Ojiisan was so happy. He found that Suzumesan was properly cared for and that the cruel wound was cured. He met her father and mother.

He saw hundreds of pretty birds dancing

in beautiful kimonos. Lovely music filled the air. He ate rare dainty food and drank good wine which never came to an end. Everywhere he looked he saw costly ornaments, and beautiful paintings on the walls. It seemed that Suzumesan's home was very rich indeed.

At last it grew dark and Ojiisan said he'd better say goodbye. Immediately there appeared two big sparrows, one with a big black wicker box and the other with a small one.

"A present for you Ojiisan." explained Suzumesan's father. "Choose whichever you

like and take it home."

Ojiisan looked at the big box—he looked at the small one. He placed his two hands before him and made a low deep bow.

"Thank you for the lovely time, dear people of birdland. I have enjoyed everything very much. I shall never forget all of you. Thank you for the nice present which I will take home and treasure as a remembrance. It is growing dark already and as I am an old man I will take the smaller box."

The sparrows smiled happily and Ojiisan carrying the smaller box on his back, bade many a farewell to them all as they waved

their tiny little wings.

"Sayonara, sayonara! Come again, come again dear Ojiisan."

He was really very astonished and rubbed his eyes again and again, but he was more astonished when he reached home and opened the box—for it was filled with all sorts of beautiful gifts.

Jewelry of every kind, sparkling coins, rare clothes and oh, a hundred other lovely things.

Of course Obaasan was very jealous. She never wished to share goods with Ojiisan.

She wanted to have everything her very

own, so the next morning she went early hoping to get the big box. She walked fast through the meadow—up the hill, until she reached the bamboo grove.

The birds twittered excitedly and hid themselves behind the trees, but Obaasan rapped on Suzumesan's gate and demanded admittance.

When she was admitted she looked round curiously, and was fidgety the whole time for she did not feel very comfortable among Suzumesan's relations and Suzumesan hid herself away up in her room. Obaasan also was in a hurry to carry off the big box—so

it was not long before she was saying sayonara and eyeing the big box till it was given to her.

The big box was very heavy—so heavy that when carrying it she could scarcely walk. Before long Obaasan was sweating and breathing heavily. The roads were rough and sharp stones cut through her straw sandals. She stumbled many times but she would not give up her heavy burden.

"Oh dear I can't wait any longer. I'll at least open the lid and see what's inside." thought Obaasan. She sank on her knees and placed the box in front of her and

opened it.

Goodness, gracious me!

Green snakes with red tongues, spotted frogs and grotesque enormous bogies arose. They put out their tongues and licked her. They stretched out their wobbly arms and tried to hug her. They threw sharp stones at her and laughed.

Their laughter sounded like this:—

"Gera—gera—gera—gera"

Obaasan was terrified. She screamed for help. She tried to push away the ghastly looking creatures. She really was frantic with fright.

Now the kind Ojiisan had come up the path in search of her. He did not know she had gone to get the big box, but when he heard her terrified shouts he ran as fast as he could, and was horrified to find poor old Obaasan struggling helplessly among the dirty creatures.

He pulled her up by the hands and together they ran down the hillside over the meadow to their home as fast as they could.

Ojiisan was quite out of breath by the time they reached home safely.

As for Obaasan, she sank down on the threshhold and with her face buried in both

hands cried and cried and cried.

"I'm sorry—I'm sorry." she sobbed, "I'm a wicked woman. I'm a ne'er do well. How can you forgive me."

Ojiisan smiled happily, for though he was out of breath and his knees were shaking after pulling Obaasan down the hill, he knew she had at last found how selfish and jealous and greedy she had been.

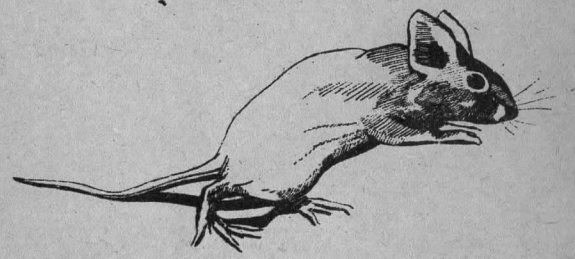
So Ojiisan forgave her, and you may be sure Obaasan did her best. And well, after that they lived happily ever after.

Oh, I must not forget to tell you that the next spring Ojiisan took Obaasan to

Suzumesan's home, where they were both treated equally well.

All birds have sharp little eyes you know, so they knew how good Obaasan had become.

NEZUMI NO YOMEIRI

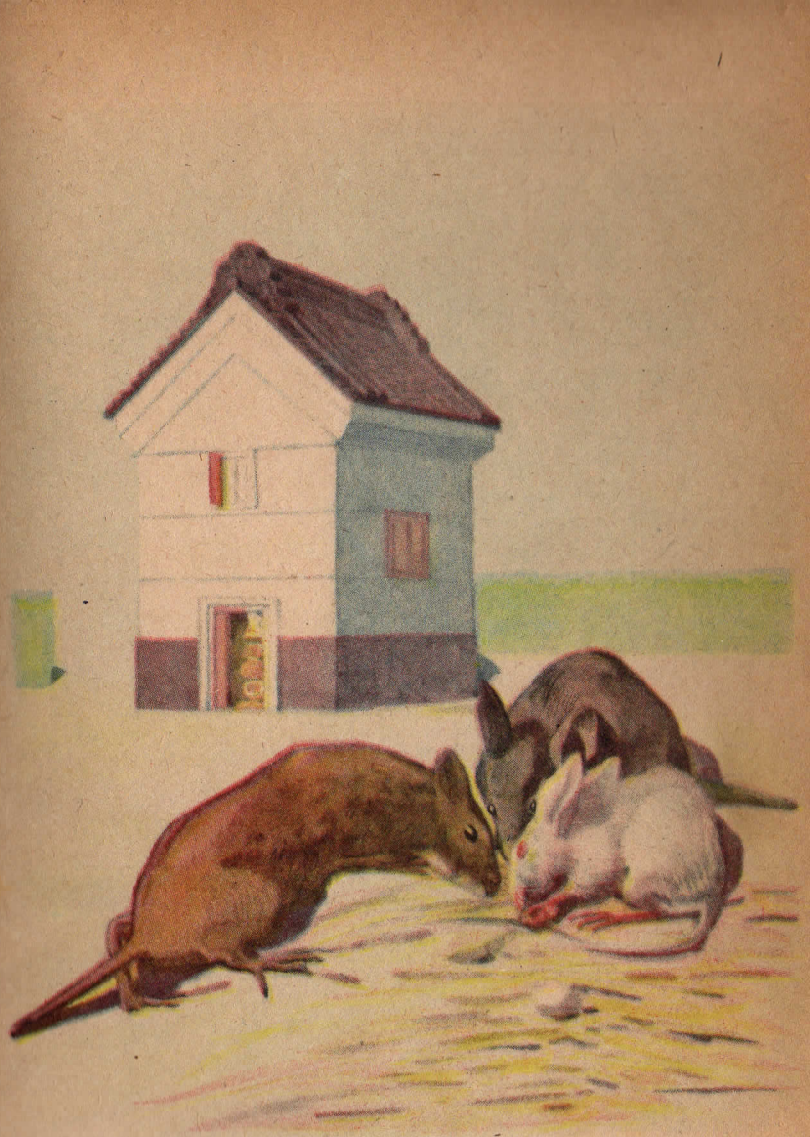


OTŌSAN and Okāsan Nezumi, which means Father and Mother Mouse lived in a store house in Japan. They possessed rice and were very rich.

They were also very proud of their beautiful daughter, and no wonder for she was white and soft and furry all over. She had bright glistening eyes, and the most delicate pink nose. She looked so sweet and pretty in a mousy way that young mice men from near and far came to ask for her hand.

But her parents Otōsan and Okāsan Nezumi were not satisfied to have a clumsy ordinary mouse as her husband.

"That can't be—no ordinary fellow is worthy of our beautiful daughter." they cried, "We must think of someone special. We'll give her to the most powerful person in



Japan."

So they looked around and lo, up in the sky they saw the warm kind sun beaming down on them.

"Why not the all powerful sun?" they cried delighted at the idea.

So they dressed their daughter in her bridal attire, and never was there such a desirable and beautiful mouse-bride as she.

Now I don't know how they did it, but the three travelled and travelled and at last reached the sun.

The father bowing low said: "Most gracious and kind sun. You are the most

powerful person on earth. Behold our daughter—whom we wish to give to you as your bride."

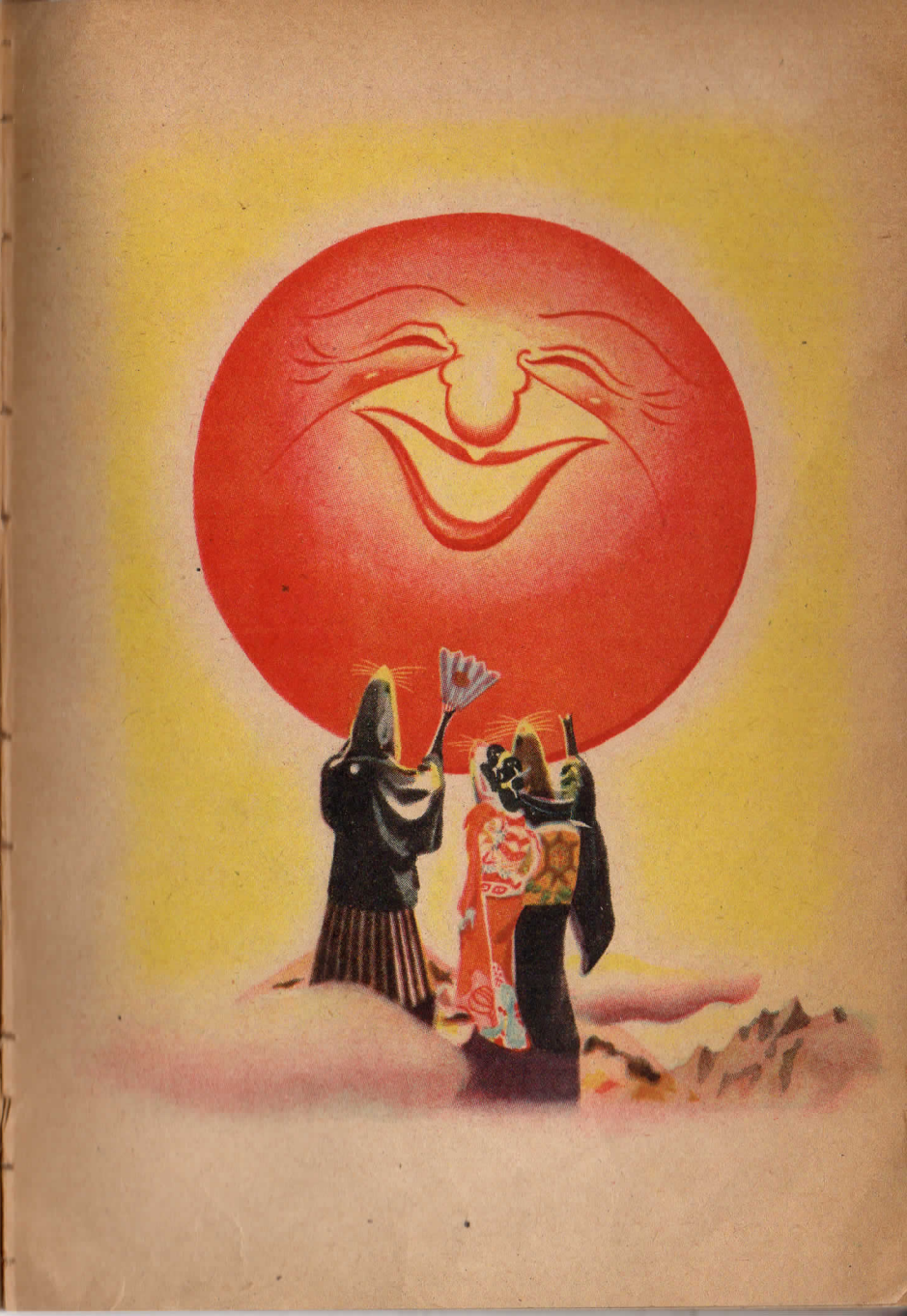
The sun continued smiling down on them, and he said,

"You are kind, and I am thankful to you for your proposal, but I am not the most powerful being on earth. There is someone else."

Otōsan and Okāsan Nezumi were surprised,

"Who can this be?"

"It is Kumo, the cloud. I would like to beam and beam on the earth and make



it warm, but when the cloud comes out I am helpless."

"Well well," said Otōsan and Okāsan Nezumi staring at each other, "Naruhodo it is so—it is so!"

So they bowed and taking their daugher, visited the cloud.

"Kumo-san Kumo-san. You are the most powerful being on this earth. Please take our daughter as your bride."

"Thank you for thinking of me," replied the cloud, "But there is someone more powerful than I. I am quite sure of myself until Kaze, the wind comes. Then I am

blown into little bits."

"Naruhodo—quite true, quite true." cried Otōsan and Okāsan Nezumi.

They then took their daughter to Kaze, the wind.

"Kaze-san, Kaze-san. You are the most powerful person in Japan. We have brought our daughter for your bride"

"Thank you dear Otōsan and Okāsan Nezumi." replied the wind, "but I am not the most powerful. I blow and blow but when I come across a strong wall I can do nothing."

"Oh dear, that's quite true." cried the

parent mice in despair. "We had better visit the wall."

Well, they took their daughter to the wall and asked him to take their daughter as his bride.

"Thanks," was the reply, "but there is someone else. I try to be hard and square, but when Nezumi, the mouse nibbles at me I am helpless. Holes grow in me."

By this time the poor daughter was so tired that her fine whiskers trembled, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Dear Otōsan and Okāsan. I would rather be the bride of our neighbor, Chū-

suke, though he is just a common mouse."

"Indeed no! He is no common mouse. Only a few days ago he gnawed a big hole through Kabe-san, the wall. Why he is the most powerful person in Japan!"

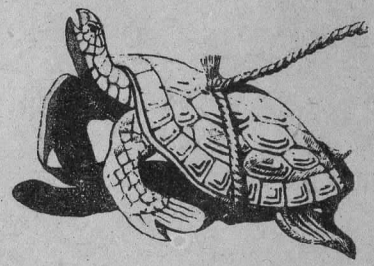
And they were so proud of Chūsuke, the common mouse living next door, that they gave their beautiful daughter to him as his bride.

They had a very splendid wedding and the young bride and bridegroom lived happily ever after.

They took great care of Otōsan and Okāsan Nezumi. They also had many child-

ren and their family grew and prospered.

URASHIMA TARŌ



URASHIMA Tarō was a poor fisherman. But he was young and kind and good, and such people are usually happy, aren't they?

One day with a rod on his shoulder and a few sen in his pouch he started out towards the sea for a catch. Near his boat by the lapping waves he saw a group of dirty urchins.

The children had caught a tortoise and had tied it up with a piece of string. They were pulling it along and some were throwing stones at it and laughing and shouting.

The poor tortoise was struggling to get away. Sometimes it would hide in its shell but the children would then pull its legs out and drag it along again.

Urashima could not stand this—

"Hey there—you children! Don't tease that poor little thing. Leave it alone." he cried. But they only laughed and behaved rudely.

"What's that you say—fisherman? We caught this beast. It's ours—see? Leave it alone—indeed. You'd better leave us alone!" they cried.

But Urashima did not give in.

He took out of his pouch the few sen he had, and seeing the greedy looks on the urchins' faces, pleaded with them for an exchange.

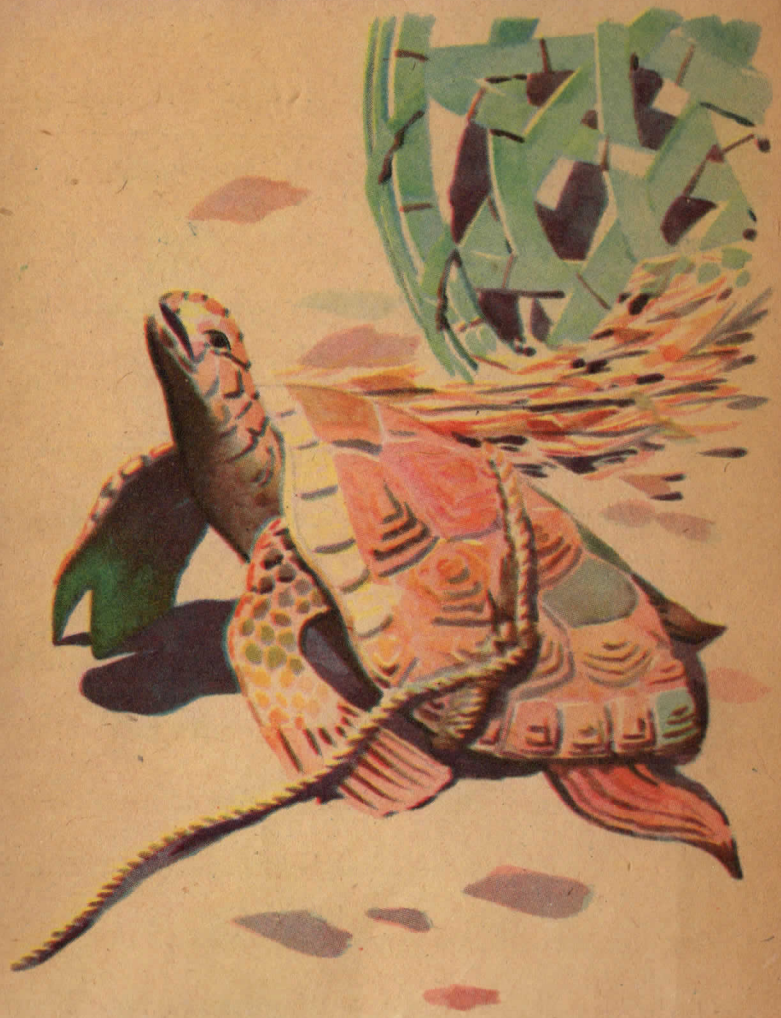
The little tormentors were only too glad

to get the money, so grabbing it they ran away leaving the poor little creature all tied up.

Urashima untied the dirty string that was around the tortoise's legs and stroking its hard shell gently said, "Don't get caught again, my little friend. Run away to your home."

The tortoise turned its bright beady little eyes this way and that and nodding gratefully to Urashima scuttled away towards the rocks.

A few days later Urashima was fishing far out at sea, when suddenly he noticed a little wet brown head nosing his boat. There



he saw his little friend the tortoise.

"Urashima san, Urashima san! Thank you for your kindness to me the other day," it said, "I have come to take you to Ryūgū, which is a wonderful place deep down under the sea." Urashima thanked the tortoise and was astonished to see him grow larger and larger until he was almost the size of the boat.

"See how big I can grow!" it cried. "You sit astride my back Urashima san, and I'll take you there."

So Urashima anxious to see Ryūgū, and full of excitement settled himself on the

tortoise's back.

Ryūgū which means "Dragon Palace" was a wonderful place in the depths of the sea. Urashima had heard of it but nobody he knew had ever been there, so you can imagine how pleased and happy he was to be able to go there. There, he had heard, lived a beautiful princess who never grew old.

The tortoise swam on and on, then plunged deeper and deeper into the sea.

Urashima saw weird looking grass waving this way and that. Fish that he had never seen before darted in and out. When he came near the palace, yet other kinds of

fish came to greet him. Then he saw that from the entrance facing him were rows of pretty sea animals holding lanterns to greet him.

The palace was like a dream palace.

It was a wonderful building, the magnificence of which quite took Urashima's breath away.

The tortoise swam through the rows of lanterns up to the entrance to the great portals opened wide to receive him. But Urashima's eyes were glued on the beautiful princess standing there to greet him.

There she was, erect and slender.

Her glistening black hair was beautifully drawn up on her head. Her dress was made of a material unknown to Urashima. It looked soft and shimmery and floated in graceful lines around her.

She was indeed lovely beyond words!

She held out her hand graciously, and, smiling, said in a sweet voice:

"Dear Urashima, you have been so kind to my tortoise. Thank you Urashima. Wouldn't you like to come into my palace and spend some time with me?"

Who wouldn't!

Urashima felt so happy. His heart was

beating fast. He had hosts of fish servants to wait on him. In his room a beautiful suit lay ready for him to put on. So after a short time the poor fisherman emerged a handsome young man.

The princess was waiting for him. She took him to the great banquet hall and showed him all the wonders of sea life. He had everything that he wanted—delicious food—clothes—a bevy of servants.

And the sea-folk entertained him so well that Urashima had no idea how fast time was going. He spent day after day entranced by the beauty of his hostess. Month after

month and year after year slipped by.

But Urashima never forgot his home or his friends, or his dear country.

There came a time when a shadow would cross his face when he was thinking of them —and the princess who was quick to see all that went on noticed it and asked him what it was that made him look sad.

"Ah dear princess—I am thinking of my old friends and my home!" said Urashima in a low voice. "I cannot forget them —and often I think it is time for me to bid you farewell."

It was hard for Urashima to leave the

beautiful princess—but she gave him a sweet smile and said simply,

"I understand you Urashima. You are lonely away from the people of the upper world. It is better for you to return to them."

So Urashima bowed gratefully and went into his room, where he pulled out his old fisherman's clothes. The way they looked and their smell made him long all the more for the upper world, so changing into them he quickly came to the princess to thank her and bid her farewell.

She received him graciously and sweetly

and in her hands held out a black lacquer box, saying:

"Urashima, I give you this box. You must carry it wherever you go. It will prove to be a great treasure. But never open it—never never open it."

Urashima looked up at the princess and he saw a look of regret cross her sweet face. His heart was heavy with sorrow at parting from her, but he could not help doing so.

He bowed silently, and walked away towards the faithful tortoise who was to take him back to his home.

So Urashima left Ryūgū, miles and miles down in the sea, and came back to his native land. Seeing the familiar scenery before him, with a happy laugh he jumped off the tortoise which silently took its leave. Then holding the pretty lacquer box under his arm he began to run towards his home. How eager and glad he was to be back!

But alas! What had happened to his home! It was deserted! The thatched roof had fallen in. Long green grass grew around it. Cobwebs and dust had gathered everywhere. Urashima was dismayed! He wandered away to other houses but every-

where he went he saw strange streets and houses and unfamiliar faces. All his relatives and friends had disappeared. Everybody looked at him curiously and laughed at his old fashioned fisherman's dress.

"But don't you know Urashima? Urashima, the fisherman. Isn't there anyone who remembers him?" he cried in despair.

"Ah," said an old man, coming forward slowly, "I have heard, that in olden times there was a youth of that name living here. There is a fantastic story of a certain Urashima who went riding into the sea on the back of a tortoise."

So while Urashima was living happily with the princess, hundreds of years had elapsed.

Urashima gave up all hope and found himself wandering aimlessly along the sea shore. Then he remembered that he was still holding the princess' lacquer box.

"I have nothing left but this!" he cried in despair. "I will open it, though I have been forbidden to do so."

So sitting down on the beach, Urashima lifted the lid. A column of smoke rose out of the box and enveloped him, and before he knew how it happened he had turned

into an old white-haired man.

Urashima, I am sorry to say did not meet with a happy end. But you know he ought to have kept his promise. Of course he wanted to go back to his princess very much, but he did not know the way without the faithful tortoise.

So he had to spend the rest of his short life by himself, a very lonely old man.